

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 244 020

UD 023 556

AUTHOR Jimenez, Rebecca S.
 TITLE Studying Urban History through Oral History and Q Methodology: A Comparative Analysis.
 PUB DATE Mar 84
 NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southwestern Social Science Association (62nd, Fort Worth, TX, March 1984).
 PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
 EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
 DESCRIPTORS *Community Attitudes; Comparative Analysis; Factor Analysis; *Oral History; *Q Methodology; *Urban Renewal
 IDENTIFIERS *Texas (Waco)

ABSTRACT

Oral history and Q methodology (a social science technique designed to document objectively and numerically the reactions of individuals to selected issues) were used to investigate urban renewal in Waco, Texas. Nineteen persons directly involved in the city's relocation and rehabilitation projects granted interviews. From these oral histories, 70 statements were selected as most representative of the various points of view and were then used in a Q sorting procedure in which 16 of the interviewees took part. At first sight, the interviews seemed to reveal several distinct groups of citizens: employees of urban renewal, civic leaders, positive-thinking relocatees, dissatisfied and harshly critical relocatees, disillusioned community leaders, and one grateful owner of a rehabilitated home. These citizen groupings, however, did not endure under the computer analysis of the Q methodology. The Q sort factors revealed one favorable factor and one extremely favorable factor. Both factors agreed that urban renewal was beneficial to Waco, presenting a more positive picture of urban renewal than evidenced in the oral history interviews. From the results of the Q sort it appears that several of those who in their interviews voiced opposition to urban renewal did not share enough of their opinions to form a third factor. In general, both oral history and Q methodology demonstrated that the majority of citizens interviewed were very pleased with urban renewal in Waco, Texas. (CMG)

 * Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
 * from the original document. *

ED244020

Studying Urban History Through Oral History
and Q Methodology: A Comparative Analysis
Rebecca S. Jimenez

The national program of urban renewal began as part of President Harry S Truman's Fair Deal with the Housing Act of 1949. Title I of the legislation established an urban development program for the acquisition and clearance of the nation's slums and blighted areas.¹ Waco, Texas, embarked upon its urban renewal program on 7 May 1957; before the projects ended in 1975, ten areas of the city had been rehabilitated with varying degrees of success.

The records of the Urban Renewal Agency of Waco agency reveal a plethora of federal paperwork. Yet a notable lack of humanity exists in the moldy papers; the personal and social ramifications of relocating persons from their homes is nonevident in contemporary records. Public opposition to Waco's urban renewal was minimal, but beneath the sanguine exterior lay an undercurrent of citizen discontent. Unhappy Wacoans, by and large, had no means of expressing their views; only through unwritten sources could such persons register their sides of the story.

With its primary purpose of recording the unique, intensely personal remembrances of eyewitnesses to or participants in events of historical note, oral history seemed an appropriate medium for recording the stories of urban renewal participants. Q methodology, a social-science technique designed to document objectively and numerically the

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Rebecca S Jimenez

2

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve
reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this docu-
ment do not necessarily represent official NIE
position or policy.

UD023556

reactions of individuals to selected issues, was another way of collecting and evaluating Wacoans' feelings about urban renewal.

Both research techniques arose from a philosophical change in the humanities and social sciences that has occurred since the 1930s. Since the eighteenth century, studying a person's subjective, peculiar perspective had been anathema to historians and social scientists alike. Rational thinkers sought objectivity; inner experience was considered unreliable, unstable, and therefore unscientific, unobservable, and untrustworthy.²

The revisionist view of a tractable science created by Newton, Darwin, Einstein, and others brought new considerations into the academic study of society. Many scholars in both the social sciences and the humanities have discovered that human emotions and feelings are appropriate subjects for examination. Allan Nevins published The Gateway to History in 1938, challenging historians to explore human memory and incorporate recollections into their research.³ In 1953 British psychologist William Stephenson's The Study of Behavior codified the rubrics for the study of subjectivity through Q methodology.

A study of urban renewal simultaneously through oral history and Q methodology provides a link between the humanities and the social sciences, which have been divided only in the last century. Historians and social scientists alike remain interested in human behavior. Oral history and

Q methodology frequently cross disciplinary boundaries. Though they technically differ greatly, both seek to discover, document, and interpret how individuals think about given subjects; both employ intensive approaches to documenting human experience and share the characteristics of complexity and prolongedness. In each method, the relationship between the observer and the observed is lengthy but narrowly focused; respondents give complex answers to numerous general questions and probes.⁴

The two methods were used to investigate the topic of urban renewal in Waco. Nineteen persons directly involved in the city's relocation and rehabilitation projects granted oral history interviews between 1981 and 1983. Included in the study were their perceptions of urban renewal's purpose, the conditions in Waco prior to urban renewal, its procedures, the attitudes toward federal participation in local affairs, and the overall assessment of the program. Interviewees included municipal officials, urban renewal staff members, and persons who were relocated by urban renewal or received home rehabilitations. The first two groups were readily available; relocatees proved more difficult because many had died or moved from Waco by the time of the present study. Waco businesspeople relocated by urban renewal proved reluctant to comment on the effects of the federal project while pastors of area churches readily commented on the work.

While each interview and interviewee was unique, certain similarities exist between them. In their interviews, two civic leaders tended to view urban renewal in terms of its overall benefits to the city, for example, removal of blighted areas and increased tax revenues. Neither of these men had daily involvement with urban renewal. Although both had reservations about Waco accepting federal funds, they wholeheartedly favored urban renewal in principle.⁵

Five former Waco urban renewal staff members recalled their commitments to urban renewal's stated goal of decent, safe, and sanitary houses for all residents; the employees realized the personal impact of the project on residents' lives and readily distinguished between the city's various projects. The staff members had witnessed the city's worst housing and abject poverty at close range. All commented that although many affected residents objected to urban renewal at first, once they realized that their new homes would likely be of better quality than their present ones, they ceased their outcries.⁶

Persons relocated by urban renewal were far less enthusiastic about the federal work. Most positive of the interviewees were two black women who mourned the deterioration of their longtime neighborhoods but felt that urban renewal's overall positive effects outweighed the difficulties visited upon individuals.⁷

Much harsher reaction came from two Mexican-American women who were relocated. One had struggled through the years to

improve her home while rearing eleven children and remained unconvinced that she had received an equitable payment from urban renewal for their home.⁸ The second woman tried three locations for her previously successful tortilla shop before finding a satisfactory location.⁹

Still another disgruntled Wacoan bitterly recalled the price she and her siblings received for their land; her lawyer was unable to help her obtain more money. She contended that urban renewal was a ploy on the part of Waco's white elite to confiscate land from those who were financially unable to fight for their rights. Urban renewal, she further asserted, forced many older residents into debt, and many of them died as a result of the trauma of leaving their homes.¹⁰

A deacon of the Edgefield Baptist Church objected not to the purposes of urban renewal but to the disposition of the land. The church's leaders believed that the land would be improved and resold to area residents for home sites. Instead, Baylor University bought all of the project's cleared land and leased it to apartment developers. The church's membership dropped precipitously; new apartment-dwellers had religious affiliations elsewhere. This interviewee also blamed the slowness of the downtown mall project for the business district's downfall.¹¹

One oral history interviewee had the option of either selling her house for demolition or accepting a rehabilitation

loan; she chose to remain and received a low-interest loan for work on the house's plumbing, wiring, and roof. She praised the urban renewal officials and their expeditious work.¹² The president of a Mexican social organization also favored urban renewal because of wretched conditions along the Brazos River. His organization received a fair price for its clubhouse and bought a larger lot and constructed a larger hall than they could have otherwise.¹³

Urban renewal gave the owners of two Waco downtown businesses reasons to move from the declining area. Both were pleased with the prices given for the buildings and the assistance with moving costs. Both businesses' volumes of trade improved after their relocations; the owners were relieved to be away from the downtown area which urban renewal ultimately failed to salvage.¹⁴

The two black Waco clergymen interviewed objected to the lack of information on urban renewal given to residents; they said plans for demolition were under way by the time residents realized what the outcome of urban renewal would be. Members of the Waco black community hired an attorney but later became resigned to the inevitability of removal. To one of the pastors, the projects around his church were a "type of Pearl Harbor."¹⁵ Believing urban renewal to be a rehabilitation program, many residents were taken aback upon learning that their homes would be demolished rather than repaired.

The nineteen oral history interviews formed the basis for the second part of the study of urban renewal in Waco, Texas. The interviewees' distinct points of view were to be compared and contrasted through Q methodology. Statements of opinion came from each of the interviews; from these, seventy were selected as most representative of the various viewpoints. They varied from declarations such as "White people did urban renewal the way they wanted it" to "Many relocatees resisted change, but a year or two later they were glad they moved." In a procedure called Q sorting, the statements were then divided into positive and negative perceptions of urban renewal's purposes, its procedures, residential relocation, commercial relocation, and federal government intervention in local concerns. Cards bearing the various statements, one per card, were distributed by each person in the study along a continuum from strongest agreement to least agreement, with the section in the center theoretically for statements about which the person was neutral or ambivalent. Each person performing the Q sort first divided the statements into those which he or she agreed with, disagreed with, or about which he or she felt unsure or neutral. The subject then placed the four statements he or she most agreed with at one end of the continuum and continued until exhausting the set of cards with which he or she disagreed. The same procedure occurred in reverse for the cards with which the subject disagreed. Finally, the

subject arranged the neutral statements between the extreme ends of the continuum, sometimes registering more positive or negative feelings about some neutral statements than others.

Three persons who had given oral history interviews in the present study did not perform Q sorts. One had died. One was illiterate; though it was theoretically possible for her to sort the cards as they were read to her, a barrier between her English and the researcher's Spanish would have rendered the sort extremely difficult. One interviewee was willing to participate in the study but declared the Q sort statements to be a collection of "catch phrases" which reflected neither his knowledge nor his understanding of urban renewal in Waco. He then verbalized his thoughts on urban renewal, greatly amplifying the record created by his oral history interviews.

Sixteen persons, however, did perform Q sorts. The individual sorts were subsequently processed by computer. Each sort in the study was compared and correlated to all other sorts using factor analysis, a procedure which groups people with similar perspectives into factors. Differences between factors represent distinctions in subjects' images or perceptions of the topic being researched--in this case, urban renewal in Waco.

Two factors, or groups of people, emerged from the factor analysis; ten persons loaded significantly, or clustered, on factor 1 and two persons loaded significantly, or grouped themselves, on factor 2. One person loaded on both factors

and was thus considered "confounded"; three did not load strongly enough on either factor to be considered significant. The moderate correlation between factors indicates a slight relationship between them; while each is distinct, it shares views with the other.

Analysis of the statement rankings on factor 1 indicates that this group strongly favored urban renewal in Waco. They were acutely aware of the need for revitalization of some neighborhoods; they appreciated the intercession of the federal government and believed that citizens had ample opportunity to participate in urban renewal planning. Pragmatic in their views, this group was cognizant of urban renewal's limitations and more objectionable aspects but viewed the overall program favorably.

Persons grouped on factor 1 felt most positively about statements such as "Relocatees were able to buy nicer homes than they ever would have without government help" and disagreed most strongly with "Urban renewal officials did not inform us; when we really knew what was happening, it was too late to have much to say about it." Included in factor 1 were all urban renewal employees in the study and both civic leaders. One Waco businessman whose store was relocated had a median score, and two residential relocatees formed the bottom of the factor. One negative loading on factor 1 indicates that the person's responses were antithetical to the others'; where they saw urban renewal as positive, she saw it just the opposite.

Persons loading on factor 2 were more positive about urban renewal than persons loading on factor 1. The statements with which these persons agreed most strongly were unqualified assertions of urban renewal's worth for residential areas. Persons in this factor group favored government participation, believing also that urban renewal had allowed citizens free expression. Factor 2, however, does show considerable ambivalence toward the results of the downtown project.

Persons loading on factor 2 felt most positively about the statement "Urban renewal provided all citizens in its boundaries with decent, safe, and sanitary housing." The factor appears idealistic because of the high agreement with unqualified statements of urban renewal's overall worth. The statement which evoked strongest disagreement from persons loading on factor 2 was "The tornado [of 11 May 1953] was the beginning of the deterioration of the downtown area." Factor 2 consists of both Mexican Americans with significant scores, a male and a female.

Beyond the separate factor loadings, there are discriminating statements about which the factor groups differed in their assessments. The differences in their scores indicate where the ideological breaks occur between factors. The statements with the greatest difference in scores are "The tornado was the beginning of the deterioration of the downtown area" and "Urban renewal was not a controversial

issue." The two factors varied greatly but nonetheless share a general approbation of urban renewal in Waco, agreeing on the ranking of forty-three statements out of seventy. The statement with the highest consensus was "People don't like to change; they fear the unknown"; the highest disagreement registered was toward "Urban renewal was a waste of tax dollars." Both factors agreed that urban renewal was beneficial to Waco, presenting a more positive picture of urban renewal than evidenced in the oral history interviews.

The nineteen sets of oral history interviews and the sixteen Q sorts complement each other to reveal significant aspects of the history of urban renewal in Waco, Texas. The oral history interviews are, of course, personal documents. At first blush, they seem to reveal several distinct groups of citizens: the employees of urban renewal, the board members, the positive-thinking relocatees (including both businessmen), the dissatisfied, harshly critical relocatees, the disillusioned community leaders, and the one grateful owner of a rehabilitated home. These citizen groupings, seemingly obvious in the oral memoirs, do not endure under the computer analysis of the Q methodology; the Q sort factors reveal one favorable factor and one extremely favorable factor. Only one person loaded negatively on the favorable factor, which would suggest the congruence of her Q sort with her oral history interviews. Three of the respondents

expected to reveal negative attitudes did not perform the Q sort; two of those who opposed Waco's urban renewal did not have significant loadings.

Usually, oral history and Q methodology reinforce each other's findings; where the results vary, speculation may suggest new theories or explanations. Though the nature of the information provided by the two research methods is quite different, each elicits responses of a very personal nature. In general, both oral history and Q methodology demonstrate that the majority of citizens investigated in this study were very pleased with urban renewal in Waco, Texas. From the results of the Q sort, it appears that several of those persons who in their oral history interviews voiced opposition to urban renewal did not share enough of their opinions to form a third factor.

Much more research is needed to bridge the gap between the social sciences and the humanities. The blending of subjective quantitative methodologies such as Q and humanistic approaches such as oral history can lead their practitioners to mutual new inquiries into human experience.

Rebecca Sharpless Jimenez is the assistant director of the Baylor University Institute for Oral History. This paper is based upon her master's thesis, "A Comparative Analysis of Oral History and Q Methodology: An Urban Renewal Case Study" (Baylor University, American Studies Program, 1983).

Notes

¹U.S., Congress, Senate, Housing Act of 1949, Pub. L. 81-171, 81st Cong., 1st session, 1949, 63 Stat. 413, 414.

²William Stephenson, The Study of Behavior: Q-Technique and Its Methodology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 23.

³Allan Nevins, The Gateway to History (Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1938).

⁴Larry P. Baas and Steven R. Brown, "Generating Rules for Intensive Analysis: The Study of Transformations," Psychiatry 36 (1973):172.

⁵Abner Vernon McCall, Oral Memoirs of Abner Vernon McCall, typed transcript of a tape-recorded interview conducted by Thomas L. Charlton and Thomas E. Turner (Waco, Texas), in progress, Baylor University Institute for Oral History; Truett K. Smith, Oral Memoirs of Truett K. Smith, a tape-recorded interview conducted by Rebecca S. Jimenez (Waco, Texas), in progress, Baylor University Institute for Oral History.

⁶Kneeland H. Clemons, Oral Memoirs of Kneeland H. Clemons, a tape-recorded series of interviews conducted by Rebecca S. Jimenez (Waco, Texas), in progress, Baylor University Institute for Oral History; Henry Lloyd Corwin, Oral Memoirs of Henry Lloyd Corwin, typed transcript of a tape-recorded series of interviews conducted by Thomas L. Charlton and Rebecca S. Jimenez (Waco, Texas), in progress, Baylor University Institute for Oral History; Mary Lee Dean, Oral Memoirs of Mary Lee Dean, typed transcript of a tape-recorded interview conducted by Rebecca S. Jimenez (Waco, Texas), in progress, Baylor University Institute for Oral History; L. H. McCloney, Oral Memoirs of L. H. McCloney, a series of tape-recorded interviews conducted by Rebecca S. Jimenez (Waco, Texas), in progress, Baylor University Institute for Oral History; Lewis D. McGuire, Oral Memoirs of Lewis D. McGuire, typed transcript of a series of tape-recorded interviews conducted by Rebecca S. Jimenez (Waco, Texas), in progress, Baylor University Institute for Oral History.

⁷Annie Keeling Randle, Oral Memoirs of Annie Keeling Randle, a tape-recorded interview conducted by Rebecca S. Jimenez (Waco, Texas), in progress, Baylor University Institute for Oral History; Mary Ann White, Oral Memoirs of Mary Ann White, a tape-recorded interview conducted by Rebecca S. Jimenez (Waco, Texas), in progress, Baylor University Institute for Oral History.

⁸Juanita Ybarra Herrera, Oral Memoirs of Juanita Ybarra Herrera, a tape-recorded interview conducted by Rebecca S. Jimenez (Waco, Texas), in progress, Baylor University Institute for Oral History.

⁹Cayetana Navarro, Oral Memoirs of Cayetana Navarro, a tape-recorded interview conducted by Rebecca S. Jimenez (Waco, Texas). In The Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

¹⁰Yolande Williams Green, Oral Memoirs of Yolande Williams Green, a tape-recorded interview conducted by Rebecca S. Jimenez (Waco, Texas), in progress, Baylor University Institute for Oral History.

¹¹J. L. Martin, Oral Memoirs of J. L. Martin, typed transcript of a tape-recorded interview conducted by Rebecca S. Jimenez (Waco, Texas), in progress, Baylor University Institute for Oral History.

¹²Julia Duron, Oral Memoirs of Julia Duron, typed transcript of a tape-recorded interview conducted by Rebecca S. Jimenez (Waco, Texas), in progress, Baylor University Institute for Oral History.

¹³Tomas Arroyo, Oral Memoirs of Tomas Arroyo, typed transcript of a tape-recorded interview conducted by Rebecca S. Jimenez (Waco, Texas), in progress, Baylor University Institute for Oral History.

¹⁴Milton Watkins, Oral Memoirs of Milton Watkins, typed transcript of a tape-recorded interview conducted by Rebecca S. Jimenez (Waco, Texas), in progress, Baylor University Institute for Oral History; Ross Brown McCollum, Oral Memoirs of Ross Brown McCollum, typed transcript of a tape-recorded interview conducted by Rebecca S. Jimenez (Waco, Texas), in progress, Baylor University Institute for Oral History.

¹⁵Marcus Langley Cooper, Oral Memoirs of Marcus Langley Cooper, typed transcript of a tape-recorded series of interviews conducted by Daniel B. McGee (Waco, Texas: Baylor University, 1982), 226 pp. In The Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas; Marvin C. Griffin, Oral Memoirs of Marvin C. Griffin, typed transcript of a tape-recorded series of interviews conducted by Thomas L. Charlton and Daniel B. McGee (Waco, Texas: Baylor University, 1982), 240 pp. In The Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.